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ABSTRACT

Based on the assumption that demographic data regarding persons who utilize public assistance is the best starting point for effective public assistance programs, the author examines such data for several groups of welfare-vocational rehabilitation clients. The hazards of viewing these people from the aspects of emotional problems, character defects, etc., are explained and illustrated. The demographic variables of age, sex, marital status, living arrangement, number of children, race and education are discussed in terms of the selected groups. Some factors which could have contributed to the group characteristics are mentioned. The intention of the whole discussion was to suggest that such demographic variables can be used to assess the pressures, resources, liabilities and problem solving strategies of public assistance applicants, with no necessary reliance on traditional terminology and assessment techniques. Actual data and elaborate statistical analyses were not presented and, by the author's own admission, more elaborate mathematical techniques would be necessary to produce precise and usable knowledge of relationships. (TL)

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Demographic and Psychological Characteristics of a Group of Welfare-Vocational Rehabilitation Clients

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Perhaps the description of ADC tested and dropout groups and a DPW sample in terms of demographic variables qualifies as the least interesting of all imaginable topics. I will choose a time honored tactic and claim that research in this area is extremely critical. Personal and social problems across the board are partly causes and products of the disintegration of the family. Most public assistance programs, and especially ADC, are token efforts designed to preserve families and protect children. Precise demographic data regarding ADC recipents is a starting point for more effective action.

The disintegration of the family and the state of being poor which often accompanies it are explained by a great variety of social theories which are demonological in nature. Some say the poor are paying for sins such as defective heredity and poor motivation; others say that external demons such as bigotry and business persecute them. However, to call the devil by the wrong name is to be unable to control him. A few social observers suggest it is more accurate and useful to analyse the poor as being an integral part of an ongoing system.

This system has a lot of dirty jobs to be done and it insures that there is an ample supply of people for performing them. This is accomplished by providing many persons with no more than maintenance incomes. Family life hardly thrives at such a level and public assistance is an acceptable substitute husband for many wives.

Thus, it is being suggested that the subjects of this study can be assisted only to the extent permitted by the system. It is too naive to assume that these people and the poor are "unskilled" and only need DVR training to enable them to become productive and stable middle class citizens. From a behavioral point of view, these people have hosts of skills; their problems are that they are un-

employed and/or underpaid. They are skilled but they are interchangeable and dispensable. Their products have no quick, dramatic effects on the material environment, on many people, or on the wealthy. "Unskilled" service people have these characteristics. Parents and most women not supported by males having adequate incomes also share these characteristics. Such groups of "non-producers" lack the requirements for political and economic power which would raise their standard of living more effectively.

To move onto more immediately relevant matters, more emphasis should be given to the fact that the poor, the recipients of public assistance, and the persons in this study do indeed have skills and resources and that they probably do many appropriate things about their situations. I will use a simple problem solving model in discussing the group differences in demographic variables in contrast to the commonly used medical model. There is no clear rationale for assuming that these people are emotional basket cases or that most psychological terminology can do much for them. Their "emotional problems," "character defects," and so on can be viewed as inevitable reactions to immediate life situations and years of learning in such situations. It may be that vocational or other training can do little for them because of the system and their place in it. Even so, I hope to point out some possibly useful directions for further agency research on demographic characteristics. As I mulled over our data, I raised questions about these persons' life situations--the pressures upon them, their resources, and their options. Many of these variables could be easily identified, measured, and evaluated in further research. I might even suggest that professionals may already be making greater use of informally collected data of this sort than of a more "psychological"sort.

At this point it is probably apparent that another custom in the writing of papers in psychology is being followed; the title of this paper does not accurately describe the text. There will be little discussion of the "psychological characteristics" of the subjects. I will at least mention the psychological test mean profiles and scores for the tested females. The study was mostly concerned with this group and the last paper will discuss a more precise analysis of test characteristics of subgroups. Mean test profiles are crude descriptive devices at best as they easily may be artifacts resulting from the mutual cancellations of many very deviant scores. Keeping that in mind, it can be said that the MMPI, CTMM, Kuder, and Work Motivation Schedule profiles for this group of women are very unremarkable. This fact supports this paper's assumption that these people are quite "normal" in many important respects.

I will briefly mention another assumption or hypothesis worthy of investigation. It may be that response sets elicited by an immediate situation such as the testing situation may contribute greatly to the variance in test scores and thereby make conclusions about more enduring characteristics of individuals difficult and tentative at best. For example, it could be suspected that people requesting DVR assistance may check some MMPI complaints merely because they are acutely distressed and/or they are telling DVR they are in need of assistance. There is a peak on the "psychopath" scale which is partly made up of items referring to everyday troubles of life. Then there is the CTMM profile indicating a low average ability level. The poorer performance on initial subtests and

numerical reasoning subtests could be a stress reaction rather than measures of abilities implied by subtest labels. On the Kuder, there was little group deviance from scale means but peaks on computational, social service, artistic, and clerical scales could reflect a set to check items related to training that is available and jobs that are available and that pay a little more for women. The artistic items may be less clearly related except for vocations such as beautician work. The Work Motivation Schedule only dips on the independence scale and this might again reflect a set to ask for help.

The hypothesis that these people are more competent than is usually assumed to be the case can be illustrated by two brief case descriptions. These individuals actually are not described by the statistics and profiles and perhaps not very well described by their own test scores. The first woman, aged 30, has managed to obtain a college education while working as a cashier and she only needed one course and supervised teaching to obtain her certificate. She has managed to work, care for her boys, and get her bachelors degree despite CTMM subtest percentiles ranging from 8 to 93, a total IQ of 101, and an MMPI profile that could suggest a distrustful attitude and impulsivity. The second one is also a success story of a sort. This 29 year old woman has been through four marriages and has only a daughter to show for her efforts. Her Total IQ score is only 74 but an 86 Language IQ reflects some verbal skills. Curiously, on the Kuder, a very strong interest in the scientific area was indicated. On the MMPI, she seemed to be somewhat distrustful and introverted. However, the facts are that this woman has a good work history including being a hospital nurses' aide and that she appeared to be a very pleasant

person in the interview. Well, these are just samples of the hazards of reading tea leaves without looking at the person's overt behavior, his history, and the world of reality--his environment. We will now consider the demographic variables.

In almost any investigation of human behavior, age is either held constant or is evaluated as an independent variable because of obvious reasons. Significant age differences were found in this study between all groups. The DVR group mean is two years below that of the DPW group and the dropout group mean is two years below that of the tested group mean. Greater group differences are apparent in the medians. The DPW median is 29 years, the tested group median is 26.4, and the dropout median is only 23.5. Correspondingly, about 76 per cent of the DPW and the tested groups were below 35 years of age but 88 per cent of the dropout group was younger.

Thus, a somewhat youthful group was selected by DVR and many of these dropped out of the evaluation process. The data do not explain the reasons for these results but there are some obvious possibilities. Younger persons could have been selected because of numerous factors having to do with potential for benefiting from a DVR program and the degree of need for such a program. They would seem to be more capable of learning new skills, more adaptable to educational and novel situations, more motivated to acquire independence, and more receptive to counselling testing, placement, etc. They might have more pressing needs because of recent separations, the dependency of very young children, etc.

Nevertheless, they tended to drop out and this could have been because of many factors which need to be evaluated. Perhaps most of these are related to a greater availability of resources and options.

Families are more likely to be willing and able to assist young people. The young can also call upon peers for small loans, lodging, information on jobs, assistance in moving, etc. They are held down less by property and other interests, debts, friends, sentiment, and so on. They are more likely to resume marriages or find new partners to assist them. Jobs requiring little more than youthful strength, endurance, speed, and enthusiasm are widely available. The young are less concerned about unpleasant work conditions, novelty, and low status. They may make use of a variety of agencies and institutions other than DVR since their problems are not usually as specific in nature as those of older people. At the same time, they may hesitate to use public assistance because of possible stigma.

It would be expected that the older applicants would not have all these options. They have more limited resources to begin with and they probably have exhausted many of these before contacting agencies. By the time they get to DVR, many institutions have been tried and eliminated. This is partly because their problems and complaints are likely to be more focalized. In contrast, the young may be generally unskilled socially and vocationally. If the older client has a long history of using public assistance, he knows the necessity and the nature of the game of cooperation he must play. If his problems are recent ones, he knows he has few alternatives.

Next to age, sex is probably the most significant demographic variable and it is a conspicuous one in this study. All of the client groups were predominately female although the sex ratio is about one to one in Oregon. The ratio was about one to three in favor of females in the DPW and DVR samples. The dropout group had 37 per cent males leaving only 20 per cent males in the tested group.

It is to be expected that most ADC clients would be women but the proportion was the same in the DPW group. What is of special interest is that males tended to drop out of the DVR program. This is probably because men have more alternatives and they do not necessarily exhaust them before contacting -the agencies. Even for the unskilled, there are more jobs and higher pay available for men than women. The male also has more freedom of movement. He is less attached to the parental home, he can much more easily work away from the marital home, and he can even abandon dependents.

There is also more pressure on the male to work. He is more likely to have extra dependents while the woman usually has only her children. There is more of a stigma attached to his receiving public assistance while it is often considered quite acceptable for the woman. The male is less willing and less able to play the waiting game with agencies. If he persists with DVR programs, he is not necessarily highly motivated or dependent, he probably has little choice.

For the female, public assistance may not only be an acceptable resource, it may even be a necessary way of life. Most women in this society remain economically dependent upon men, especially if they have children. They receive less specialized training and relatively few jobs provide a woman and her children with more than a maintenance income. If she marries an unskilled or semiskilled male, their income still may be inadequate for a stable family life. They may have to use public assistance even without separations, serious illnesses, and other disruptions of income.

When the woman applies for assistance, she may have exhausted resources such as support from an absent husband, her family and friends, and easily available jobs. It is especially in her interest to complete

almost any training DVR may offer so as to insure a stable income above the maintenance level for herself and her children. Otherwise the only significant alternatives may be a reconciliation with her husband or another marriage. These are not likely to be immediate or even desirable prospects from her point of view after separation or divorce.

The separated and divorced were found in all groups in large numbers. There were significant differences among the groups in these categories but not in the single and widowed classifications. Forty-five per cent of the DPW group had intact marriages in contrast to 37 per cent of the DVR group and only 27 per cent of the former group were separated while 34 per cent of the latter group were. The drop-out group had about the same percentage of stable marriages as the DPW group. The tested group claimed only 31 per cent intact marriages while almost 60 per cent were separated or divorced.

The dropout group actually had more functioning marriages than the tested group. It is not possible to tease out the numerous confounding variables which could be responsible for this fact. These people were also younger and had less time for separation and divorces. This is a more heavily male group and a male receiving ADC is more likely to be with his spouse than an ADC female. Males living with their families are under more pressure to seek work and other resources yielding more immediate payoff than DVR. With wives at home, they are not handicapped by the need for a babysitter. This situation is quite different for the many women with children in the tested group. The men in that group may not have this problem but they probably are handicapped and older.

The clients' living arrangements were classified as being

with parents, the spouse, a common-law partner, a group, a relative, or a friend or as living alone. Differences among the groups only reflected the marital status data. About 40 per cent of the DPW and dropout groups were living with spouses. Only 28 per cent of the tested group lived with their spouses and 55 per cent of this group lived alone

The number of children living with clients is one indication of their responsibilities and limitations in seeking training and work. The mean for the DPW group is 2.44 children, the tested group's mean is 2.32, and the dropout group's mean is 2.13. Very few of the DPW group had no children but six to eight per cent of the dropout and tested groups had no children. The most relevant fact is that one adult had responsibility for most of the children in all groups and had to provide care and supervision as well as an income.

All of the groups were fairly homogeneous on the education variable. The mean years of education are 10.56 for the DPW group, 10.69 for the dropout group, and 11.00 for the tested group. Five per cent of less of each group completed less than eight years. The DPW and DVR groups were similar in that about 90 per cent of each group completed eight to twelve years of school and about 40 per cent completed high school.

DVR evaluation procedures produced dissimilar groups in regards educational level. Those who persisted with testing were better educated with 47 per cent acquiring twelve years or more of school while only 33.9 per cent of the dropout group did so. It might be too easily assumed that the more highly educated are better motivated, more cooperative, better organized, etc., but they may persist while the less educated drop out for other reasons. One

possible factor is that interviews and examinations are situations in which the educational dropouts have failed and expect to fail. They may realistically refuse to invest in training programs where they may fail again or may acquire a skill no more valuable than those they already possess. They also would be less choosey about immediately available jobs and less patient with bureaucratic procedures.

Race was another significant factor and it is probably related to the education factor. There was not a heavy representation of non-whites in the DPW sample despite their greater use of public assistance in this country. It is true that only two per cent of the Oregon population is non-white, but only five per cent of the DPW group was non-white. The DVR group contained slightly more at seven per cent. Of greatest interest is the dropout rate of non-whites during evaluation proceedings. They constituted fifteen per cent of the dropout group, almost three times their frequency in the tested group.

Some possible explanations are immediately apparent even though they are somewhat paradoxical. Presumably, the non-whites would be the "most needy" but there is less in the way of circumstances and habits which might hold them in training programs. They may more easily find and accept unskilled jobs than the white clients. This may especially be true if they have limited confidence in the relevance of DVR training and placement.

An easily neglected factor possibly contributing to the dropout rate is the similarity of the evaluation process to customary middle class professional and educational procedures. These may be assumed to be natural and efficient to most persons and especially to middle class persons. To others, they may be seen as failure

situations, and they give up upon hearing about and experiencing interviews, tests, etc. Their lives are also not so full of precise appointments, convenient transportation, etc.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that DVR chose a group having about the same characteristics as a DPW group relative to sex, marital status, living arrangement, number of children, race, and education. These groups contained a preponderance of women, separated and divorced persons, and parents with several children. DRV did tend to select younger persons. The clients made their choices as they persisted with DVR's evaluation procedures or failed to show for psychological testing. This latter course tended to be taken by younger persons, male, high school dropouts, non-whites, and those living with their spouses.

Some of the factors which might contribute to the group characteristics were mentioned. The intention of this discussion was to suggest that demographic variables can be used to assess the pressures, resources, liabilities, and problem solving strategies of public assistance applicants with no necessary reliance on the traditional terminology and assessment techniques. This actuarial approach was not actually demonstrated since only a few simple categories and more elaborate mathematical techniques would be necessary to produce precise and useable knowledge of relationships.

At least part of such research and its application could be less expensive and more objective than psychological assessment. A mass of pertinent data on an individual's history and current circumstances can be gathered by questionnaires in the time it takes to conduct several interviews and test administrations. Actual analysis

and use of such data would not be so simple and processing equipment would probably be necessary. The point to the approach would be to make for greater objectivity and efficiency in evaluating, selecting, training, and advising clients. The agency could develop more rigorous policies for the distribution of its services as it weighed need, potential, and risks more carefully.

I would like to skip back to the service of advising clients, about practical matters for a moment. This is a much neglected or even rejected approach in the helping professions. One might suspect that this is because it more explicitly implies responsibility, requires much technical knowledge and judgment, and is less grandiose than training adults for vocations or presuming to overhaul their personalities. As it was suggested earlier, almost every client has many skills which can be used for effective problem solving. The difficulty is in eliciting these appropriately and knowledge of demographic and situational variables is essential in this endeavor. The payoff is that giving practical advice about moving, obtaining loans, making friends, and a multitude of other situations can accomplish more for many individuals than expensive training in another skill.

Another fairly specific matter was suggested by the data and the speculations regarding them. It did seem too simple-minded to attribute clients dropping out of evaluation procedures to their being "unmotivated," "unreliable," or subject to other sins. It is more parsimonious and challenging to consider the possibility that an institutional procedure such as evaluation is designed to serve agents of the institution as much as it is to serve an avowed function. Interviewing, test administration, and other procedures are more comfortable to highly educated professionals than to educational dropouts who may

actually avoid such failure situations. Then there are many minor but often decisive circumstances which may determine whether or not an individual shows up for an evaluation. A few of these are vagueness of explanations, transportation problems, difficulties in finding babysitters, and the content of appointment letters. These could be investigated and controlled to insure cooperation with much less expense than studies of sociological characteristics of the dropouts.

I have suggested only a few of the possible uses of demographic research on public assistance clients and I have done so only in a very general way. The next necessary step is a rigorous study that would stimulate potential research more than do generalities and speculations.